



A Nonpartisan Public Policy and Research Office of the Connecticut General Assembly

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Testimony of Julia Evans Starr
Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging

The Housing Committee

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*With 21 volunteer
board members from
across the state*

Senators Winfield and Osten, Representatives Butler and Rose, and esteemed members of the Housing Committee, my name is Julia Evans Starr, and I am Executive Director for Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging. I thank you for this opportunity to comment on various housing bills before you today.

As you know, Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan, public policy and research office of the General Assembly. It has been an effective statewide leader in improving the quality of life for older adults and persons with disabilities for 22 years. With just 4 employees and 21 volunteer members from across the state, we shape innovative public policies, promote government accountability, establish diverse partnerships and coalitions, and analyze demographic trends to prepare Connecticut for a growing older adult population.

Raised Bill No. 156: An Act Concerning the Data Collection and Analysis of Affordable Housing.

Connecticut is undergoing a historic demographic transformation: it is aging. Connecticut is the 7th oldest state in the nation with the 3rd longest-lived constituency, and between 2010 and 2040, Connecticut's population of people age 65 and older is expected to grow by 57%. Data is the foundation on which towns must plan for their changing communities, especially in working to affirmatively diversify the state's housing stock. Nearly 70% of occupied homes in Connecticut are single-family, which will present challenges as demand continues to grow for other housing types. Moreover, the majority (59%) of Connecticut's housing stock was built before 1970, and the remaining stock (41%) built after 1970 may not meet the needs of Connecticut's changing demographics. And importantly, statewide, only 11.3% of housing units in Connecticut were counted as affordable in 2014, according to the Affordable Housing Appeals list.¹

¹ Partnership for Strong Communities. Housing Data Profiles: Connecticut, 2015.
http://pshousing.org/housingprofiles2015/PSC_2015HsgProfile_CT.pdf



In addition to the demographic changes, Connecticut is in the midst of rebalancing its long-term services and supports system. This means that programs, policies and funding opportunities are being aligned to support older adults and persons with disabilities in their homes and communities as opposed to nursing homes. An example of this policy and culture shift in action is the Money Follows the Person program implemented by the Department of Social Services in which over 3,100 people have been transitioned from nursing home care back into the community.

Relatedly, as you may know, pursuant to Public Act 13-109, the Legislative Commission on Aging spearheads an ongoing, statewide livable communities initiative. Livable communities are places that foster independence across the lifespan to facilitate aging in place and community. Necessarily, livable communities offer affordable, accessible and diverse housing options in every Connecticut community. Such diversity of housing stock is important not only for older adults, but also the myriad of professionals necessary to support older adults and persons with disabilities in their homes.

Raised Bill No. 156 implements regulations to streamline the data collection obligations of the Department of Housing, pursuant to already existing state and federal law. All areas of data collection are important in helping the state meet its legal obligation to affirmatively further fair housing. But for our collective efforts to give people true choice in where and how they receive long-term services and supports and the Commission's livable communities work, we are particularly interested in helping towns understand where the gaps lie between projected housing needs (for older adults and across the lifespan) and the state's current subsidized housing stock. Accordingly, we support Raised Bill 156.

Raised Bill No. 157: An Act Concerning Adequate and Safe Housing for the Elderly and Younger Persons with Disabilities.

As you know, for decades, older adults and younger persons with disabilities have both resided together in publicly financed housing projects.² Through our work, we are aware of the robust discussion of both the potential opportunities and problems that can arise from the co-existence of these two tenant groups. For some older adults, the experience of living in close quarters with younger tenants enhances intergenerational connectivity, social supports and quality of life. For others, it can result in lifestyle clashes and fears, including conflicts, disruptive behaviors, and misconceptions about mental illness.³

² Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-114d

³A more extensive analysis of these issues and policy recommendations can be found in a December 2004 report of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, entitled *Mixing Populations in State Elderly/Disabled Housing Projects*. Available at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2004/pridata/Studies/pdf/Housing_Populations_Final_Report.pdf>

All people deserve to live in an environment where they feel safe and can retain choice, independence and dignity. Accordingly, we appreciate the challenges that some people may experience in what is often referred to as a “mixed population” setting. But it is equally important that policy strategies foster notions of shared fate, across age and other demographic characteristics, especially as the need for affordable housing continues to rise for the population as a whole.

As a result, the Legislative Commission on Aging supports a study of public housing in the state that houses both older adults and younger persons with disabilities. In conducting that study, we urge the relevant state agencies to consider and potentially incorporate the following recommendations into its analysis:

- **Provide additional supports to resident service coordinators.** Resident service coordinators (RSCs) facilitate conflict resolution between residents, establish and maintain relationships with community services providers, and help residents live independently, among other roles. Additional supports for RSCs could include increased funding, oversight and mandatory training.
- **Enhance data collection and analysis.** Strategic planning, policy development and resource allocation require data on both housing availability and need among Connecticut residents. Current efforts should streamline and integrate information on federally-funded, state-funded, and privately funded affordable housing projects and initiatives, stratified by age and other demographic characteristics. The passage of Raised Bill 156 (discussed above) could help with this effort. Further, in 2004 Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (LPRIC) conducted a study on mixed housing populations. A follow-up to that study, as proposed by Raised Bill 157, would be helpful to determine the effectiveness of implemented recommendations, to identify any recommendations not acted upon but still relevant and to evaluate the impact of the changing housing landscape, such as the more recent trend toward developments restricted to age 50 and older.
- **Promote more quality, affordable housing for all residents.** For Connecticut residents age 65 and older, 40% of home owners and 53% of renters spent at least 30% of their household income on housing. Further, the need for affordable housing is pressing across the lifespan, as among all Connecticut residents, 35% of home owners and 50% of renters spent at least 30% of their household income on housing.⁴ Accordingly, continued annual appropriations to create additional affordable housing in Connecticut are also critical.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today on these bills.

⁴ US Census, 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

